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PEACE:

HOW TO GET AND KEEP IT



BY
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PRESIDENT OF THE BRITISH TRADE UNION CONGRESS, 1916
PRESIDENT OF THE TRANSPORT WORKERS' FEDERATION, 1917

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BRITISH labour wants peace. But it wants a settled peace, a peace that will ensure the world against being once more plunged into war at the will of a group of autocratic and ambitious statesmen, eager for world power.

There is no need to tell us the horrors of war. We know them. We knew something of them before this war began. The past three years have brought home still more to all of us what war really means. There is not a parish in England without grieving mothers and mourning wives, left alone through the deaths of their sons or husbands on the field. Labour in particular has felt the rigours of war. Some of our institutions, which we imagined to be proof against all change, have been thrown into the melting pot of national necessity and emergency. The personal loss, the class upheaval, and the national waste that this war has brought us need no telling.

But just because we are appalled by the tremendous losses and sufferings of war, and of the waste of life of our picked young manhood, we are the more resolved to go on until we have ended the menace to the world that made war such as this possible. Millions of our countrymen voluntarily

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took up arms. They went to war to end war, and they mean to do it. They went to war for justice and public right, which they are resolved to maintain.

Of the exact terms and conditions on which peace may eventually be concluded I do not speak. But the working men of England know that if all our sacrifice is not to be in vain, there can only be one end, and that is the complete overthrow of German tyranny. For that we are willing to go on fighting just as long as necessary. It is the essential condition to future world safety.

We hope for the complete defeat of Kaiserism for the sake of the German people as well as for the sake of the world at large. The victory of Kaiserism would mean for labour the death of liberty. Regimented, drilled, and exploited, trade unionism under the control of a triumphant German military party would have very little power. Labour would be organised—not for freedom and for the betterment of its lot—but for its more thorough exploitation. Kaiserism and democracy do not mix. The labour movement as we know it is wholly democratic. I am convinced that one of the great causes influencing the Kaiser and his advisers when they resolved to plunge the world into war was the fear of the rising democratic movement among their own people. They saw that Labour was realising its strength and making that strength felt. They saw great growth of unrest which might well, if allowed to go on, threaten the Imperial throne itself. They diverted the energies of the people from examining their own conditions of life to war.

To-day Germany lies under a veil. The real spokesmen of German labour have been silenced.

The men and women who have dared to say what they thought have been sent to the trenches or to prison. It is no easy thing in a land like Germany for any man who opposes the national policy to make himself heard. But the forces of progress, stilled and silenced now, will make themselves felt and heard at the first opportunity. In the days before the war, I visited Germany and knew some of the organisers of German labour. I was last in Germany, at Cologne, at a gathering of the Union of Transport Workers, almost immediately before war broke out. From my knowledge of these people I am convinced that once the veil can be removed we shall find in Germany itself strong forces that are wholly opposed to the policy and methods of the ruling powers in Berlin. The peace which we have in view will give German democracy a chance to assert itself against German Imperialist militarism.

A half victory, an inconclusive peace, a settlement which settled nothing, a patched-up truce under which the nations had breathing time to re-equip themselves for fresh conflict on a still more terrible scale—that would be the crowning disaster. Our people would ask if all their sacrifices had been in vain. The barrier of suspicion and mistrust between the nations would remain greater than ever. Strife would not end; it would go on.

The trade union of which I am secretary, the Amalgamated Society of Watermen, Lightermen and Bargemen of the River Thames is, as its name shows, a union of rivermen. Our members work hard and lead a rough life. They are out at all hours, and they must be ready to face any conditions of weather. They are strong men; they must

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be strong men. Long ago they learned that if you have a quarrel, the best thing is to fight it out and end it, once and for all. When our rivermen fall out they go down into the hold of a barge, where, with the narrow sides of the hold forming the ring, they fight to a finish. Neither man can get away, neither man wants to. When the fight is done, the first business of the victor is to see to the man he has beaten, to help him up and to help him along. Then the thing is ended.

That is the British way. It is not our natural habit to bear perpetual ill will. When we have beaten Germany—as we are going to—present enmities will not endure. Our people will say, “It has been a long fight and a hard fight. It is over.”

The foundation on which future peace must be built is the defeat of Prussianism. Having laid that foundation, we can start to raise the pillars of our new world. We must plan out, so that we can to some extent avoid a repetition of what this generation has suffered.

The coming of peace will bring with it immediate and urgent problems. The immense flow of Government orders, the largest the world has ever known, will suddenly cease. Millions of soldiers will be disbanded at approximately the same time as two or three million munition workers are discharged. Unless plans are made well in advance, there may be hundreds of thousands of men unemployed. We shall be confronted, too, with the problem of women’s employment, and of the status of the unapprenticed workers who have come into skilled industries. But these problems, urgent as they are, will be temporary.

There is another deeper question. How can we

so alter our organisation of society as to make the events of the past few years yield their greatest good? War is a terrible thing, yet even terrible things may have their better side. What changes for the better will follow this war? The foundations of betterment are, I believe, two:

First. The work of Government in all its branches must be shared by the people as a whole.

Second. The people must be qualified and equipped by better education to take their share in the work of Government.

The war has helped to teach us one thing. The safety of the world depends largely on the people as a whole doing their part in the work of Government. In former generations Government was the work of a small class specially trained for it. The mass of the people were unqualified because they were insufficiently educated. In recent years conditions have somewhat changed, but the change must go much further. Does anyone think that had war depended upon the decision of the German people, the masses of Germany would in those early days have voted for it? I am aware that when passion was kindled, the German nation became for a time enthusiastic for war. But had the original decision for war or peace rested with the mass of the people, there would have been no war. The war was planned and deliberately brought about by a comparatively small body of German statesmen.

People of all classes must share more and more in the public work of their communities and of the nation. This means two things—education to qualify them for such work, and systematic efforts

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to make them realise the importance of doing their duty by taking their part in public affairs.

Education is essential, and on education must be built up the assurances of future world peace. Without it and without the consequent power to judge for themselves, people are at the mercy of the first man with the gift of fluent speech who catches their ear. The strides that have taken place in public intelligence in recent years have been enormous. I have been in public life for 25 years, and there is a great difference between when I began and now. There was a time when a man able to talk could get up and carry his audience right along with him. But let him try to-day. He will find before he has got very far that some quiet working man will stop him. "Wait a minute," the working man will say, "I want to ask you a question." And he will ask something that will go straight to the heart of the matter. Ask a question! Twenty years ago he could not have done it. To-day he is trained to judge and to weigh for himself. The industrial revolution has brought a mental revolution.

On the broadening and improvement of the education of the people I base the real hope for progress after the war. But we have to recognise that even with that, it would be folly to expect that strife will cease eternally. The generation of to-day is learning its lesson, but a new generation will spring up that will demand experiences for itself. "We have learned from your mistakes," its young men will say to the seniors. "We can accomplish what you were not able to do." And they will have to learn their lesson for themselves. We see this in the world of labour. After a long, costly, exhaust-

ing strike the seniors say, "No more strikes for us." But the young men coming on! The old men warn them, but they will not listen. "We know what you did," they say, "but we can do better." But we have to recognise that this very venturesomeness of youth, this willingness to take risks, this eagerness to try new experiments, is in itself far from a bad thing. Youth may go too far. It may have a fall and have to start again. Yet a world in which caution always ruled, where youth was always suppressed, where fresh thought, fresh ideas, and apparently reckless enterprises were impossible, would be a world of stagnation. If youth spells strife, youth spells also progress. That the world will settle down to one placid calm for ever after this war is ended, I do not expect. But this war may yet show us the way to settle strife by other means than armed conflicts between nations. Such other means can be devised, and it is for the world to see that they are devised. Here we look for a Council of Nations with power to enforce its decrees.

The war must be followed by a period of betterment for the individual worker. Attempts may be made to lower wages, if the labour market is flooded. Such attempts can only lead to disaster. No doubt Government precautions to prevent any overwhelming flooding of labour will be taken by the provision of public works during the period of readjustment. But the betterment of working class conditions must go further than this. This war has demonstrated the super-importance of labour. We look for an extension of the policy of old age pensions and health insurance. We look for an improvement in the conditions of employment. La-

bour will demand, and will be able to obtain, a fuller share in the gains of industry. Further, it will demand some share in the direction of industry.

This last point is of great importance. We are not waiting for this until the war is over. Already in various directions, labour is securing a direct voice in directing work. We do not ask that we should be admitted into any share of what is essentially the employer's own business—in those matters which do not directly concern us in our work. The buying of materials and the selling of the product are the work of the board of directors. But we do feel that we have a right to a voice—even an equal voice with the management—in deciding the daily conditions of the employment in which we spend our working lives, the atmosphere and the conditions in which we have to work, the hours of beginning and ending work, the conditions of remuneration and even the manners and practices of the foremen with whom we have to be in contact. The war has already helped us to obtain this; it will essentially develop after the war.

The importance of employers and workmen coming to a common basis of understanding is the greater because in industry, as in national life, war tends always to be conducted on a larger scale. The great war has been waged on either side by groups of nations. Should ever a great labour war come, it will be conducted by groups of industries. We have seen in recent years a process of amalgamation and alliance on both sides. The employers are more and more centralising their federations, so that the supreme direction of disputed industrial matters comes into the hands of a small controlling body. In the world of labour, we have our amal-

gamations and alliances. I myself am President of the Transport Workers' Federation, part of the Triple Alliance of labour, the combination of Miners, Railway Men and Transport Workers. This Triple Alliance could hold up the whole industry of the country, for it controls all means of inter-communication. It is administered with sufficient wisdom, I believe, not to abuse its power, but its power is there. With forces so great on either side, it is the more important to see that we lay the foundations now of good understanding for the days ahead.

One great weakness among the working men in the past has been an absence of experience in the detail routine of the conduct of great industries. The leaders of labour for a long time had no opportunity of obtaining such experience. To-day we are able to secure it by administering our own great co-operative enterprises. We recognise that it would be of great benefit to us to have closer association between organised labour and those responsible for national education. This may come. The war has given a vast impetus to these movements.

The war has had another effect. It has broken down many of the barriers which formerly existed between different classes. Men of various sections of society who are working together have come to know one another's good qualities and have learned to understand each other's point of view. I know what many of our own men of the Transport Workers' Federation say of their officers when they come back from the front. They are full of their praises. Occasionally, of course, they come across a man they don't like, but in nearly every case they find their officers accessible, sympathetic,

and helpful. When men fight together—and many of them fall together—fighting a common foe, it is certain that those who are left will find some means of standing together in the days of peace ahead. The attempt of Germany to crush us has led to the drawing together of the different classes of our people.

This better understanding of each other is being brought about in another way also. The Trades Unions of England have given every worker possible to help in the war. Trades Union officials, great and small, are all of them largely engaged in voluntary war work. They are members of different committees. On these committees they meet, as their fellow members, people drawn from quite other classes of society. The lighterman finds himself sitting next to, and working in co-operation with, the titled lady and the high military official. He discovers that they are people very like himself, and that they are working to the best of their power for the good of the nation. They in turn realise that the mysterious "labour agitator" is not so terrible an individual as they imagined. It is not necessary to put away their best silver or fine china when he comes to their houses. He has a point of view unknown to them before. They reach a common understanding over common work for the welfare of their country. That is going on in a thousand districts. It is affecting the leader of the small local branch of the Union as well as bigger officials. It is breaking down prejudices, creating new friendships, and bringing class in real touch with class.

It is impossible to imagine that all these things are going to count for nothing, and that the in-

fluences of a common purpose and a common sorrow, of common disappointments and united victories will cease when the war is over. They will not cease. They will help to make England united more than ever before.

For us there can only be one end. But once that end is attained, it is for the world to see that the sacrifice of life at once ceases. When other scourges sweep over the world, they take away the old, the feeble, the unfit. This scourge of war is robbing us of our best, of our young men in their prime, of the pick of the nation. It will leave us with a depleted manhood, and with many of our women condemned to perpetual solitude. We have during the past generation trained our young women to fill their place in life worthily. To-day, when they are emerging strong, fit mates, and fine comrades, the men who should be their husbands are being killed in the war. We will have to face the problem of the wounded and those made invalids in the war, and the fatherless children.

To solve these problems we must stand a united nation. We cannot afford to have any sections of our people ignorant, when ignorance spells weakness. We cannot afford to have any section underdeveloped, for all our strength will be needed to make up for the losses of the war. It is to the good of the country that labour should grow to the full, and that, realising its strength, it should use its strength, and use it wisely. It is essential that the old artificial barriers of class should disappear. Fresh impulses are sweeping over the world. Fresh causes of unrest are arising; there will be fresh perils to face. Knowledge, unity, justice, and the

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co-operation of all classes will see us safely through.

Sometimes, when walking through Leicester Square in London, I glance at the statue of Shakespeare, and read the motto underneath, "There is no darkness but ignorance." It is true. In ignorance lies our real danger, in knowledge is found the only sure road to permanent peace.

Mr. Harry Gosling is one of the most trusted leaders of English labour. He has a quarter of a century of public life behind him, twenty-five years full of steady, sustained work for the people.

A Lighterman by trade, he is a member of that unique labour organisation, the Amalgamated Society of Watermen, Lightermen and Bargemen, most of whose members belong to the ancient Watermen's Company of the City of London, the history of which dates back to the beginning of the 16th century. He has served for many years as a member of the London County Council for St. George's-in-the-East, and he is a member of the Port of London Authority.

He was Chairman of the Strike Committee in the great London Dock Strike of 1911. He was foremost among the organisers of the Transport Workers' Federation, and was chosen as its President. Labour bestowed upon him the greatest honour in its power when it elected him President of the Trades Union Congress in 1916. In 1917 he was made a Companion of Honour of the Order of the British Empire.

At the beginning of the war Mr. Gosling, like nearly every British labour leader, threw himself into the national cause, and has worked devotedly for it ever since. Twenty-five per cent. of the members of the Lightermen's Union—of which he is Secretary—are at work in khaki on the rivers of France. Mr. Gosling himself, as the foregoing pages show, looks beyond the war to the conditions ahead, and seeks to discover how the world can best benefit from its present fiery trial.